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**Security and Development in sub-Saharan Africa:
Looking to the Future**

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Africa's colonial legacy

The challenge facing Sub-Saharan Africa is not State building as many analysts believe. The immediate challenge most of Africa faces is society building.

Building a viable, sustainable and stable society requires the establishment and development of legitimate, socially hegemonic group or groups that can then build a viable state. This was what European colonial powers failed to do in Sub-Saharan Africa before they departed in the mid-1950s to early 1960s. Instead they left behind a semblance of a state which had no social anchors. This was what led to Africa's instability during the last half a century. This instability continues to this day in many countries despite a few signs of hope, in a handful of countries.

The most important factor in the creation of a stable capitalist society is the rise of a property owning class that controls extensive assets. On its own, this class of property owners is not sufficient to create a stable society because in order to develop the assets of these property owners and make them profitable, the owners require the technical and managerial skills of professional and artisan classes, generally referred to as the middle class. The bargaining power of this middle class also acts as a restraining influence on the political power of the large property owners.

This power balance at the existential level culminates in the emergence of the state that is established by these social formations to codify their relationship into a stable order.

European colonial powers failed to develop their African colonies along the lines described above. Instead they founded what I call pseudo-states that were stable only as long as the colonial powers controlled them. Once the colonial powers departed, these pseudo-states became a focus for conflict among the various rudimentary elites that had emerged amongst the indigenous peoples during colonialism. These new elites fought amongst themselves for control of tax revenues and other privileges associated with access to power in these pseudo-states.

In the final analysis, it was this intra-elite competition that accounted for Africa's endemic political instability during the last 50 years.

Without the re-construction of the underlying societies of the former colonies, this instability can go on literally for centuries as we have seen for example in the case of Liberia, Sierra Leone and of course Haiti.

I will now try to trace the broader and deeper sources of Africa's instability which even predate colonialism.

Slave Trade

The African continent has been in turmoil for half a millennium since Europeans started to settle in the New World in the 16th century. It was African slaves who contributed to make the Europeans' plantations and mines in the New World a profitable business. Export of African slaves to the New World was accompanied by slave exports also to Egypt and West Asia (Arabia). It was estimated that between 1500 and the end of the 19th century 18 million Africans were sold into slavery.

Slavery was so extensive it touched virtually every part of sub-Saharan Africa. The only part of Africa which was not impacted upon by the slave trade was the small region south of the Limpopo River. This is the territory which now constitutes the Republic of South Africa.

The slave trade brought about enormous social, political and demographic instability to Africa. According to one expert the population of sub-Saharan Africa in 1850 would have been double what it was in 1700. The population of sub-Saharan Africa in 1850 was roughly 50 million. If there had not been the slave trade it is estimated that this population would have been 100 million.

Colonialism, Liberation and Cold War

The end of the slave trade in the 19th century was soon followed by the colonisation of the continent, this time driven by the European powers' desire to exploit Africa's vast natural resources. European powers at a conference held in Berlin in 1884-85 set down the ground rules on how to partition Africa amongst themselves. This triggered a second phase of instability in Africa starting with resistance to colonisation and forced labour and culminating in struggles for independence after the Second World War.

The end of the Second World War brought into existence another global phenomenon that was to play an important role in the continued destabilisation of African societies and of sub-Saharan Africa. The Cold War which started in the 1940s engulfed the entire world in the competition for spheres of influence and control between the western capitalist powers led by the United States and the communist powers led by the Soviet Union.

Once again Africa was caught in this whirlwind where these two camps vied with each other to control the newly independent countries or to stop them from aligning themselves with their adversaries. Some of the most well documented interventions in independent Africa were those by the United States government which connived in the assassination of Congolese nationalist leader, Patrice Lumumba in 1961; the overthrow of the government of Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana in 1966 and in the attempt to destroy the Angolan government of Agostinho Neto and his party in the 1970s and 80s.

Intra-State Conflicts

African states as we know them today were not created by Africans. With a few exceptions, such as Egypt, Ethiopia, Liberia and perhaps South Africa, African states were created by

European imperial powers at the Berlin Conference. Africans did not gain control of these foreign-created states until recently, in the 1960s.

African states therefore suffer from a number of important handicaps. They suffer from weak allegiance by their citizens to these states and vice versa. This explains why African countries during the past 50 years have been centres of many conflicts, in particular civil wars, inter-tribal wars, violent communal conflicts and pogroms, wars of secession, and more recently in the Great Lakes region of central Africa, attempts at genocide. These great conflicts have been accompanied by vast population movements in and out of different national boundaries. Africa, not surprisingly, is host to the largest number of refugees and internally displaced persons in the world.

Secondly, because these states have only recently been captured by African rulers, African elites therefore perceive sovereignty as a valuable economic asset because it enables them to enrich themselves. This further exacerbates the weak allegiance of the populous towards these states as the process of elite self-enrichment undermines the ability of these states to deliver services to the general population.

An important aspect of conflicts in Africa, unlike conflicts of the past in Europe, has been the almost complete absence of inter-state wars in Africa. In the case of Europe fear of devastating inter-state wars was one of the driving forces behind the strengthening of the state. This is not the case in Africa. During the past 50 years there has been only two inter-state wars among African countries. These were the war between Tanzania and Uganda in the 1970s and the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea in the 1990s. The latter war could in fact be considered to have been the continuation of the secessionist war of Eritrean rebels from Ethiopia.

Inter-state wars have been an important factor in nation building, especially in Europe. Conflicts between states, which pose a threat to all citizens, irrespective of race, tribe, class, religious affiliation and so on, give rise to a number of unintended consequences.

Firstly, they strengthen the hold of the ruling class, and of the state it controls, over the general population, which, faced with an external threat, is compelled to surrender more and more of its autonomy to the state and its agents as a way of strengthening national defence and limiting dissension. This gives the rule of the rulers legitimacy, as they are seen as defenders of all the people.

Secondly, the state is forced to become better organised in order to raise and equip its armed forces while at the same time maintaining or even increasing production to sustain both the war efforts and the civilian population.

Thirdly, inter-state wars compel the dominant ruling faction(s) to make concessions to more marginalised factions in order to build a united front with which to confront the foreign enemy. Inter-state wars thus contribute to reducing or moderating various forms of discrimination against minorities.

By contrast, the intra-state conflicts that characterise Africa have resulted in the fragmentation of societies into warring factions and parties, and have made even more tenuous the already fragile allegiance of large sections of the population to the state and to those who control the state. Far from the state emerging strengthened from intra-state conflicts, it is weakened by them. A large number of its technocrats are killed or exiled and many institutions are ruined – permeated with corruption and manned by un-qualified and under-qualified personnel.

Development and the Modern African State

This brings us to an important fact about why states have proved to be largely ineffectual in promoting Africa's development process. States in Europe and Asia evolved over centuries and a great deal of experimentation went into establishing them. The result was a Europe consisting of uni-ethnic states managed by a professional class of officials governed by complex rules and regulations designed to combat favouritism and other centrifugal forces.

These laws enabled the state machinery to appear open and accessible and therefore to be operating fairly and in the interests of all members of society, with no segment of that society excluded from holding a position in the state machinery.

All these features helped to legitimate the European state in the eyes of most of its citizens. For the state to retain its legitimacy it therefore had to promote economic development which led to rising standards of living of the population. This is not the case in most of sub-Saharan Africa.

It is sometimes argued that most African countries are small, poor, landlocked, under-developed and therefore lack domestic markets. To compensate for these shortcomings, the argument goes, it is necessary that African countries eliminate barriers to trade amongst themselves. Through this route, African countries will be able to develop enterprises with the requisite economies of scale to make them competitive in the world markets, it is said.

The experience of Europe however shows that this argument is flawed. If we take the example of relatively small European countries – Sweden, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Denmark, Belgium – these countries developed world-class companies long before European integration became reality. Some of the large multinational corporations developed in these small countries easily come to mind: Electrolux, Volvo, Saab, Nestle, Philips, Unilever, Royal Dutch/Shell, Carling, Interbrew, Heineken, ABB, Ericsson, Nokia, Norsk Hydro, Roche, Maersk, UBS, ABN-AMRO to name but a few.

The examples listed above demonstrate that it is not the size of a country's population that determines whether a country industrialises or not. It is rather a country's skills pool and its control over its economic, social and security policies that, in the final analysis, determines whether a country industrialises or not.

Results of Instability

An important factor that determines whether a country develops or not is its ability to generate a meaningful economic surplus on one hand and on the other hand its ability to direct a large part of that surplus to productive investment rather than merely to private consumption. As a result of Africa's endemic instability, a large part of sub-Saharan Africa's surplus leaves the continent.

One of the most disgraceful but under-reported scandals in Africa is the extent to which African elites export capital from the continent. According to the United Nations, nearly 40% of Africa's private wealth is kept outside Africa compared to only 3% of South Asia's private wealth and 6% of East Asia's. The small economic surplus that remains, goes to finance elite consumption and to pay for the running of the largely unaccountable state.

Capital flight is both a result and a driver of Africa's lack of security. Another important driver of Africa's insecurity is the brain drain. Flight of skills undermines economic growth as we have seen by draining out technicians and other personnel needed to maintain social and physical infrastructure which makes development possible.

These factors feed on each other to drive the replay of what is now happening to sub-Saharan Africa where people are leaving the continent in droves.

Role of force

In this paper I have tried to show the deep roots of Africa's security and development crises. I hope that I have been able to persuade you that the problems of security in Africa are not easily amenable to solution by military means especially by foreigners. Interventions by foreign powers have been tried many times since the 1960s to no lasting effect. There is no better illustration of this truth than the Democratic Republic of the Congo which has been unstable – and therefore getting poorer - since the assassination of Lumumba 48 years ago.

As in all human affairs, the use of force in the right social context does produce solutions. There is no better illustration of this fact than the history of the United States. During the last two and a half centuries, your country has had three revolutions – the war of independence; the civil war; and the civil rights revolution. All these major moments in the history of the United States entailed the use of force by the protagonists. After everyone of these convulsions your country came out more stable and secure than it was before which is why the US is the world leader, economically and militarily, that it is today.

Notwithstanding what I have said about the undesirability of focusing on the military option to solve Africa's challenges, use of force to solve Africa's problems must however not be ruled out. This is why in my view the creation of the African Command by the US government was an important initiative.

Africom however must not just confine itself to working with African governments only. It must also engage with non-state actors in its effort to assist in re-constructing societies which, I have argued, is a pre-condition to achieving long term security in Africa. Clearly we have a long road ahead of us, so we need to pace ourselves accordingly.

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